

Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP  
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP  
Secretary of State for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

11 February 2013

Dear Mr Pickles and Mr McLoughlin,

**Luton Airport – planning application to Luton Borough Council  
to increase capacity to support 18 million passengers per year.**

We are the civic society of Harpenden, which is located just a few miles south of Luton and its airport. We have a membership of over 1,000.

London Luton Airport Operations Ltd (LLAOL) has recently applied to Luton Borough Council, its local planning authority and the owner of the airport, to increase the capacity of the airport. We are writing to urge you to exercise your discretion to call in the application and to treat it as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

Our reasons are:

**Luton Borough Council's crippling conflict of interest**

We believe Luton Borough Council (LBC) will not adequately assess the impact of this major development on the wider community as it is seriously handicapped by conflicts of interest, whether it acknowledges them or not. It is to be expected that any local planning authority would have an economic interest in the assets in its borough, arising from their rateable income, but LBC's interest goes far beyond this. It receives a substantial levy on each passenger passing through the airport, amounting to £25 million in 2011. This is likely to prevent the impartial exercise of its judgment in the application to double passenger numbers.

Secondly, LBC's close connection with LLAOL's wholly owned subsidiary London Luton Airport Ltd (LLAL) can be seen from the fact that two LBC councillors (Messrs Hussain and Franks) are directors of LLAL, and have been since 2007. LBC and the airport are too closely connected for LBC to be impartial, or to be seen to be impartial.

Thirdly we are concerned that unless called in for independent scrutiny, LBC's Development Planning Committee, with much local pressure to decide in favour, will be tempted to wave the Application through despite its massive and deleterious impact on a large swathe of Hertfordshire including towns such as Hitchin, Harpenden and St Albans

**Road and rail traffic**

Currently two thirds of Luton Airport's passengers arrive and leave by road. Assuming that this proportion stays the same with double the passengers, we calculated that there would be an extra 7,500 cars per day on the roads through and near Harpenden over and above those using the M1 for access. The local roads, already heavily congested for much of the day, are not designed for this extra traffic and will not cope.

Meanwhile, the rail line, Thameslink, is already a very overcrowded commuter line. Yet LLAOL say they want to increase the proportion of passengers who use the railway, while at the same time complaining to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on 5 December 2012 about the Thameslink line's inadequate capacity for the times the airport needs. It is hard to square these complaints with LLAOL's hopes to increase the number of their passengers using the railway, even at the current number using the airport, let alone for a doubling of the airport throughput. That means that the estimate of an extra 7,500 cars per day will be too low.

On top of that, Thameslink's current capacity, which LLAOL say is inadequate, will now be restricted by the needs of the new Helioslough road/rail freight depot at Radlett. Network Rail say that the new depot will cause capacity constraints on the Thameslink line, and "detriment to passenger services" will result.

LBC is not equipped to judge the strains on the infrastructure outside its own district. That is a national matter. It therefore seems to us to be crucial that it is studied by a properly resourced body independent of LBC. The improvements to Junction 10A serving the airport are regarded as a National Significant Infrastructure Project. The infrastructure implications of LLAOL's application to double its passenger numbers should be assessed in the same way.

**Noise**

LLAOL has no limit on its night-time operations other than a largely ineffective noise penalty system. Big increases in 6 am departures are planned. Although some of the official routes largely avoid Harpenden, one of them goes right over the town. In addition not all aircraft keep to the scheduled route, and they too often overfly the town. The proposal would virtually double this noise nuisance.

**Conclusion**

We urge you therefore to call in this application, and to regard it as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

Yours sincerely

CL Marsden  
Chairman, The Harpenden Society